CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for displaying an endoscopic image, comprising:

receiving an endoscopic image of a viewed surface;

providing a virtual surface with said endoscopic image mapped onto said virtual surface;

rendering a rendered image of said virtual surface; and

providing said rendered image to a user.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said endoscopic image is one of a series of video images.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said virtual surface is planar.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said virtual surface is arranged in a manner corresponding to said viewed surface.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the shape of said virtual surface is an approximation of said viewed surface.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein said approximation of said viewed surface is based on volumetric scan data.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein said approximation of said viewed surface is based on stereo imaging.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein a virtual viewing point is arranged in a manner generally corresponding to an endoscopic viewing point.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein a virtual viewing point is arranged in a manner generally corresponding to an actual viewing point of a user.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein a virtual viewing direction is directed in a manner generally corresponding to an actual viewing direction of a user.

11.   The method of claim 1, wherein a virtual viewing orientation is oriented in a manner generally corresponding to an actual viewing orientation of a user.

12.   The method of claim 1, wherein said endoscopic image is mapped onto said virtual surface according to a mapping that adjusts for distortion.

13.   An apparatus for displaying an endoscopic image, comprising:

an endoscope for capturing a captured image of a viewed surface;

a computer system in communication with said endoscope;

a monitor in communication with said computer system;

a processor which will:

create a virtual surface with said captured image textured onto said virtual surface, and

render a rendered image of said virtual surface from a virtual viewing set,

whereby said monitor will display said rendered image; and

whereby a user is provided with said captured image as effectively modified in a desirable way by said processor.